

NRO REVIEW COMPLETED

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7 February 1968

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Disposition of the OXCART

1. Bross called me to his office Wednesday morning, 7 February. Coyne had called Bross to discuss the PFIAB meeting for Thursday/Friday next. He felt that OXCART should be on the agenda in two parts--the first a briefing on the achievements since the last PFIAB meeting (11-12 December); the second a discussion of the problem of disposition of the OX vehicles. Bross considered there were three points at issue:

a) the replacement by the SR-71 which depended on that system becoming operational,

b) what to do with the OX vehicles when they return, i.e. mothball, turn over to the Air Force, retain under CIA control, and

c) what about the policy of continuing or eliminating the present non-military overflight capability.

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Background from Bross:

1. By ExCom direction Flax had or was preparing reports on items one and two above. The Director had sent a memo to Clifford asking PFIAB to discuss item three. NRO is faced with the problem of costs but not with the decision on maintaining a civil overflight capability. This capability has been a point of discussion since 1952. Both Dulles and McCona wanted out, mainly because of Air Force hostility, and loss of control in the development of objective information. Arguments in favor are tenuous and intangible, i.e. cover, security, better command and control in the civilian status. The arguments against are well known--Air Force pilots are used anyway, the Air Force is charged with flying.

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2. Bross objected to the manner in which the decision to phase out OX was made last year. It was a budgetary choice with loaded statistics and lousy logic. The question of fighting the decision in December 1966 was based on the unlikelihood that either the OX or SR-71 would be used for the originally designed job. At that time chances seemed slight and not worth appealing to Texas. Things changed in June 1967 with the decision to deploy. The performance of the last six months and the demonstrated capability of the OX created new basis for argument. Someone should now make a policy decision. The Director feels his most important contribution and, indeed, his responsibility is as an ~~advisor~~ ^{estimator}. His findings must be unbiased. He has been intent on maintaining the position of an objective advisor. He would not wish to get into a parochial argument. Into this arena has come a vocal and influential scientific community viewpoint which wishes CIA to continue. This viewpoint is based on an assessment that under CIA the OX is better flown and future developments of the aircraft stand a better chance for success. To get better plans you need some to begin with. CIA is more likely to improve on the OX aircraft. The record of the last ten years supports this argument, i.e. the U-2--U-2R. The SR-71 is not ready yet and has reached its present status only under extreme pressure from the Chief of Staff, Air Force, particularly with regard to ECM. The scientific community thinks the Director should take a strong position. Bross wants the Director to get a resolution of this problem without haggling.

3. Nitze got sore about the Director's letter to Clifford but has now cooled down. He thought that the letter undercut his position in the NRO. Bross talked to Nitze for an hour. Bross discussed the PFIAB's recommendations to the President. These had been made in three copies only--one to Hornig and two to Rostow for the President. Coyne had read the recommendation to Bross on the telephone. As near as Bross could remember they referred to the OX as a good aircraft which should not be junked and referred to the alternative of turning it over to SAC as one possibility or the best possibility or as PFIAB's recommendation. Coyne had read the letter so fast that Bross could not remember which. The recommendations had never been made available to DOD or CIA for comment.

4. Hornig reflects the feeling of the scientific community that the original decision to mothball was a mistake and that the whole ball of wax should be reviewed. He is

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reluctant to have this done in the NRO atmosphere. There is jockeying between PSAC and PFIAB as to where the issue should be decided. Perhaps Rostow should be brought in. [] told Bross that Hornig wanted to reopen the issue but was worried as to the Director's viewpoint. Should Hornig recommend retaining CIA control, a negative vote from the Director would make Hornig look silly. [] asked how the Director would vote in such a case.

5. Bross noted that the Director had on at least two occasions made explicit to him that he felt a decision had already been made on disposition. Bross, however, felt that this decision had been taken by indirection and was not a clear-cut decision on the merits of the case. When [] asked Bross explicitly if a new study were made and one alternative was keeping CIA in business, then how would the Director vote. Bross replied this would depend on the study and the formulation of the question. If there were not likely invidious effects involved, the Director would probably vote yes. Bross gave the Director an EYES ONLY memo on the [] conversation and recommended getting the issue out onto the table. He then decided to draft a letter from the Director to PFIAB.

6. In Bross' view the NRO is not set up to decide this kind of a question, i.e. the maintenance of a civilian overflight capability. NRO presides over existing resources rather than jurisdictional prerogatives. Even an ExCom augmented with the Secy. of Defense would arrive at such a decision by indirection. A negative decision in this medium would not satisfy the problem or exonerate the Director from a charge of being ^wsufficiently vigorous in upholding his rights.

7. DD/S&T should be prepared to go to the PFIAB at which the whole question of a civil overflight capability could be discussed. At least the future disposition of the OX will be discussed. Coyne was thinking of asking Flax to this discussion. Bross felt that DD/S&T should accompany Flax. Perhaps even the Director might wish to say something if the question of CIA flying airplanes came up. No decision will be made at this meeting. The DD should have the salient factors, even though they may be well known. The question will be whether to turn over the OX to the Air Force or to retain it in CIA. Most of PFIAB are not in favor of destroying a good aircraft in order to keep a second-rate aircraft operational. There is no need to argue on maintaining the OX as an operational vehicle. The DD should tick off the performance specs as related to the SR-71, i.e. altitude, camera swath, ECM. The more difficult paper will

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be a short brief on the issue of why the status quo. This should be a check list rather than an eloquent argument. Identify all points--better security, easier command and control, past performance, suggesting more imaginative improvements from a small Agency, exclusively concerned with the hostile operating environment. CIA is able to focus more of its total resources, because of small size, on the operation. The same thing is true with regard to command and control, arrangements are more flexible.

25X1A 8. Since 1952 the policy has been to avoid overflying in hostile territory with uniformed personnel. At the very least State and White House when faced with a critical situation will be psychologically less inclined to decide on an operation using uniformed personnel. The DD may have additional thoughts. The CIA brief should be less than two pages and contain all the reasons why the Agency should continue. [] is a good resource and worth having. The Air Force cannot operate the OX for less money than CIA.

9. Bross will call Flax and tell him the issue is coming up and that he hopes the DD will be able to go along. We now need a draft paper that the Director could have with him--a check list which would make it difficult for him to overlook any pro-CIA points and which was not objective but stated the CIA case. The Director will make the points in the NRO. Bross wants PFIAB to know them. Ultimately the President will have to be made aware of them.

10. Bross called subsequently to say he had talked with Flax. Flax agreed that the fundamental question on maintaining a civil overflight capability should be decided before finalizing the disposition of the hardware. Flax said that he had developed a history with the DD and would bring it with him. He wanted the DD there. Bross told him we were writing a pro-CIA position. Flax seemed to feel that this was as it should be.

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See Jim. -

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+ the connec in [redacted] + some

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Our rels ^{remain} mutually beneficial.